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AN ANALYSIS OF THE OTEGO-UNADILLA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT REORGANIZATION WITH EMPHASIS ON THE FUNCTIONAL AND LEGAL CONTROL OF THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT. A CASE STUDY.

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An analysis presents the many factors which enter into the process of reorganizing two central school districts into a larger, more effective district. The analysis follows the two districts through the reorganization procedure and into resulting administrative and financial problems. The involvement and influence of the State Education Department during reorganization are pointed out. An historical development of school district reorganization in New York State is accompanied by a chronological listing of legislation and its effect on districts. By introducing the relationships among school districts, the district superintendent, the State Education Department, and local governments, along with the elements of public support and lay-committee involvement, this study brings out much of the interaction which takes place during reorganization. A bibliography is included. (SW)

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Case Study

An Analysis of the Otego - Unadilla Central School District Reorganization

with Emphasis on

The Functional and Legal Control

of the

State Education Department

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Catskill Area School Study Council
State University College
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A

CASE STUDY

AN ANALYSIS OF THE OTEGO—UNADILLA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT REORGANIZATION WITH EMPHASIS ON THE FUNCTIONAL AND LEGAL CONTROL OF THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

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ONEONTA, NEW YORK

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FOREWORD

This careful analysis of the functional and legal control exercised by the New York State Education Department during the reorganization of two central school districts should prove useful to administrators and students of administration.

Mr. Brenner's background in political science and educational administration caused him to follow events closely during the reorganization period. His desire to be of service motivated him to give freely of his time and energy to prepare the case study.

The Catskill Area School Study Council speaks for those interested in improved public education when we thank Mr. Brenner for this display of professional interest and service. The Council is pleased to make Mr. Brenner's efforts available to school administrators, board members, and other study councils through this publication.

John Wilcox
Executive Secretary

PART I THE PROBLEM

The problem involved in this study is to analyze and appraise the factors which enter into the process of reorganizing two central school districts into a larger more effective district.

Some of the issues involved and questions to be answered are as follows: Based upon its history is reorganization an inexorable force in New York State Education? What are the elements necessary for the gaining of public support since reorganization inevitably means greater expenses, loss of community identity, and increased burdens on school administrators? What are some of the legal relationships between the school districts, the district superintendent, and the State Education Department during the process of reorganization? What is the extent of the relationship between local governments and the school districts when engaged in the reorganization process? Specifically, how did all of these elements fit into the reorganization movement in the Otego and Unadilla Central Schools? What new problems are to be faced by the reorganized Otego-Unadilla Central School Districts?

This paper will explore the new problems and decisions; it will attempt to assess the movement's influence in providing a better education for the youth of the Districts.

PART II

HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT REORGANIZATION MOVEMENT IN NEW YORK STATE

School district organization in New York State has never been static. The number and nature of districts have undergone continuous evolutionary change.[1] New York has been a leader in public elementary and secondary schooling almost from its inception as a state. The State has undergone many changes regarding its control over school districts. First, nearly every school district had to be set up by the State Legislature. In fact, this process was responsible in the first place, for the large number of school districts. The Legislature's approach was simple — divide the entire State into school districts.

These early districts were called "common school districts." Some of these districts are operating schools today. Out of a total of 1103 school districts, 349 are "common school districts." But, only 75 are running schools while 274 common school districts are contracting out for complete school services.[2] It is interesting to point out that common school districts are second to central school districts in sheer numbers of legal entities — 398 to 349.[3] The other type of school district which should be most susceptible to reorganization is the Union-Free District; there are 190 of these in the State today.

At the present time the State is concentrating on combining smaller central schools into reorganized districts while preserving the community consciousness and

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[1] State Education Department. Better Education Through School District Reorganization, (Albany, N.Y., 1964), p. 1.

[2] State Education Department. "School Districts As Of January 1, 1964," (Albany, N.Y.: Bulletin of the Bureau of Rural Administrative Services, 1964), p. 1.

[3] Ibid.

identity still maintaining lay participation in New York State elementary and secondary education.

What has been the history of this movement? Rather than relate all the changes over the past 150 years this writer has constructed the following chart hoping to point out in Part III that certain pivotal dates and legislation have had a very direct effect on the Otego—Unadilla Reorganized School District. The main source for Chart No. 1 is the 1958 Revision of the Master Plan for School District Reorganization in New York State unless indicated otherwise.

Chart No. 1

Chronology of Legislation Affecting School District Reorganizations

Date	Legislative Acts	Effects on School Districts
1812	Legislature divided entire State into school districts or potential school areas.	As the State's population grew new school districts were formed. This led to extreme proliferation in the number of districts.
1845	Legislature began to realize that districts would have to be reorganized.	Approximately 11,000 school districts.
1851	Passage of Free School Act.	Both of these acts were predicated on two new principles in education. They were; a) a larger school could provide a better education and common school districts could raise their own revenues for secondary education.
1853	Passage of Union-Free School Act.	
1867	Repeal of the Rate Bill.[4]	This repeal opened the way for more general taxation by union free schools and the number of high schools grew rapidly.
1914	Passage of the Central Rural School Act.	Although designed to "speed up" district reorganization, this act was ineffective.

[4]Lynton K. Caldwell, The Government and Administration of New York. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1954), p. 330.

Date	Legislative Acts	Effects on School Districts
1919	Passage of the Township Act	Departing from past policy the Legislature attempted to link politically the townships into school districts. This Act failed dismally and was eventually repealed.
1925	Committee of 21 and the Cole-Rice Act.	State aid laws were amended and incentive amounts were paid to centralize. Centralizations grew rapidly in number. Total number of districts decreased.
1938	Board of Regents Inquiry	Recognized that many central school districts, hastily organized, were small, expensive, and inefficient. Recommended that between 600 and 1200 pupils be in a district.
1942-1947	Joint Legislative Committee on State Education System	Created the Master Plan for School District Reorganization — providing a pattern for laying out new districts and reorganizing the old.
1955	Heald Commission or the Temporary Commission on Educational Finances	Advocated strongly the combining of small-enrollment (rural) central school districts and revising the Master Plan.
1958	Revision of Master Plan according to Chap. 723 of the Laws of 1956 Advisory Committee[5]	Publication entitled A Guide to Reorganization for New York State. Advocated, once again, reorganization of smaller central school districts.
1960-1961	Special Committee on School Districts Improvement, Charles H. Diefendorf, Chairman.[6]	Proposals to increase state aid expressly for elementary and secondary education.
1964	The Waters Bill or "The Incentive and Impedance Bill" Print 6115 (See Appendix A)	This bill would have created a "special incentive payment" for school districts reorganizing now and in the future. It was vetoed by Governor Rockefeller on April 27, 1964.

After studying Chart No. 1, it becomes apparent that New York State has placed major emphasis upon decreasing the number of administrative school units over the last century. One must also keep in mind that the State's aims have been two-fold —

[5]State Education Department. A Guide to School District Reorganization for New York State. (Albany, N.Y.: 1958), p. 3.

[6]The Hon. Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, Messages to the Legislature. (Albany, N.Y.: Legislative Document No. 40, 1961), p. 4.

decreasing costs per pupil while increasing both qualitatively and quantitatively the education of the pupil. Has the movement been successful? As pointed out previously there are 1,103 school districts in the State. Of these, 274 do not operate schools of any kind. When this figure is compared with the 11,000 of the 1812-1845 era it can be realized that the State is quite successful in the diminution of the number of units.

The establishment of quality education is still largely a local affair. The State hopes to provide the financial aid and professional guidance for the creation of a better and more effective learning environment. Was the State able to achieve this purpose in the Otego—Unadilla Reorganization Plan?

In summary, the writer's purpose has been to point out that the State has developed a set of standards for better education in the rural school systems. The next step is to determine which ones were especially instrumental in launching this particular district reorganization.

PART III

REORGANIZING THE OTEGO AND UNADILLA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS INTO THE UNATEGO CENTRALIZED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Both Otego and Unadilla are incorporated villages. They are situated in the Susquehanna River Valley on Route 7, a two-lane heavily traveled highway, mid-way between Albany and Binghamton, N.Y. The two districts are contiguous and a high degree of co-operation involving shared services, co-operative board specialists, and friendly sports competition has marked their relationship.

The village of Unadilla has an approximate population of 1550 while Otego has 750-800 inhabitants. The two villages formed the core of their respective school districts. There is a high degree of pride in the fact that each of the schools have done well in providing an education for the rural youth of the area. Neither village expected a sudden influx of population. But, the difficulty was the "creeping" increase of school enrollments coupled with the State's restrictions regarding the construction of "on-site" additions to existing buildings in lieu of participation in a reorganization plan.

Both districts are populated by a nucleus of interested and spirited persons who were willing to serve on curriculum and evaluation committees, election campaigns, and most important, the Citizens' Committees for the Reorganization of the District.

Also, the administrators of both schools are highly respected and capable professional educators who were willing to work countless extra hours in the accomplishment of this major task. Another important fact was that the District Superintendent, Mr. Harold Tyson, was superintendent of the district embracing both schools. He favored reorganization strongly.

In addition to the above advantages the districts had the following disadvantages which added to the urgency of the situation.

a. Otego Central, built to hold 450 pupils, now had 661. Unadilla Central, built to hold 678, now had 887.

b. Both Otego and Unadilla were using every available public building in their respective villages — on a year-to-year approval by the State Education Department.

c. Neither gymnasium was large enough.

d. Junior and Senior High School science labs and libraries were both antiquated and inadequate.

e. Otego had no Industrial Arts facilities and Unadilla had no Vocational Agriculture.[7]

It would appear that the two districts had a rare combination; the assets to overcome a problem, the urgency and need for immediate action, and the urging of the State to get the job done.

This "urging" by the State Education Department has had many different aspects — leading to both functional and legal control of the reorganization movement in the district.

First, in the Master Plan, the State has been consistent; they have always urged the reorganization of Franklin, Otego, and Unadilla Central Schools into a reorganized district. This has not always been the case in reorganization movements. In the adjacent school district of Bainbridge-Guilford, the Commissioner of Education in 1958 allowed 3 very different changes until a combination of communities voted in favor of the reorganization movement.[8]

In 1958 there were Curriculum and Evaluation Committees of the lay citizenry at work in both Otego and Unadilla. While various curriculum changes were proposed both committees arrived at the same conclusions and recommendations regarding space requirements.

> As a result of our study we have come to the following conclusion. In order to alleviate the shortage of space and to enrich our curriculum we need the following:

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[7]Citizens' Committee, District Reorganization: The Direct Route to Better Education. (January 17, 1963), p. 3.

[8]Bainbridge-Guilford Central School Districts, "News-Release! Bainbridge-Guilford School Merger Vote." (Master Plan Revision Bulletin, April 5, 1961), p. 1.

1. 8 additional classrooms of approximately 770 sq. ft. in size.
2. 1 Home Economics Suite of approximately 1540 sq. ft.
3. 1 General Suite of approximately 1540 sq. ft.
4. 1 Gymnasium.
5. Acquisition of additional land to fulfill minimum requirements (at least 10 to 12 acres)
6. Renovation of existing building.

We feel that these requirements can best be fulfilled by addition to the present plant and acquisition of land close to the existing site.[9]

Two major factors should be pointed out; a) while this report was concerned mainly with Unadilla, an Otego committee had come up with nearly identical recommendations regarding their building, and b) these committees worked over a year with school officials and State Education Department consultants. Through these studies both communities developed an "informed" nucleus of lay citizenry who were utilized in the election campaign for reorganization of the district.

The recommendations for separate building programs were sent to the State Education Department. As expected, they were rejected. Dr. Walter Crewson, Associate Commissioner for Elementary, Secondary, and Adult Education, said the State Education Department opposed a local building program. Secondary schools should have more than 500 pupils. Also, the State will not encourage additions.[10]

Further study by interested groups took place during the years of 1961 and 1962 and District Superintendent Harold Tyson was asked o revise and bring up-to-date cost-studies and revised aid-ratios under the provisions of the Diefendorf Law (See Chart No. 1). An attractive reorganization brochure was developed and circulated during the fall of 1962. Reactions were favorable in both communities.

On October 18, 1962 Superintendent Tyson, in his role as legal contact between the local districts and the State Education Department, wrote that the Boards of

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[9]Educational Survey and Planning Committee, Report 1960-1961. (Unadilla, N.Y.: 1960), pp. 49-50.

[10]Letter from Dr. Walter Crewson, Associate Commissioner, to Mr. Millard Gage, Chairman, Citizens Committee, Otego, N.Y., May 13, 1960.

both districts want to consider a proposed merger.[11]

An interesting point is that Mr. Tyson specifically requested Mr. Donald Benedict of the Bureau of Rural Administrative Services to serve as consultant. Mr. Benedict had earned the respect of the local school administrators through his work in reorganizing a number of adjoining districts.

On November 2, 1962 Mr. Benedict replied that petitions requesting the Commissioner of Education to "lay out" a reorganized district would be forwarded to Mr. Tyson.[12] He stressed that only people in favor should sign the petitions, Citizens' Committees (now engaged in campaigning for reorganization as a "way to better education") should inform the voters before having them sign, and, lastly, "the Commissioner uses the 60% favorable vote as a rule of thumb not fixed by law."[13]

It becomes readily apparent that the District Superintendent plays the most influential role in initiating district reorganizations. What are the limits of his powers? In the Education Law his duties are outlined in Sections 2202, 2204-2217. The specific sections that concern reorganization say the following:

> A district superintendent of schools shall have power and it shall be his duty: 1. To inquire from time to time into and to ascertain whether the boundaries of the school districts within his supervisory districts are definitely and plainly described....[14]

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[11] Letter from Mr. Harold Tyson, District Superintendent, to Mr. Francis E. Griffin, Chief, Bureau of Rural Administrative Services, Unadilla, N.Y., Oct. 18, 1962.

[12] Letter from Mr. Donald Benedict, Bureau of Rural Administrative Services to Mr. Harold Tyson, District Superintendent, Unadilla, N.Y., Nov. 2, 1962.

[13] Ibid.

[14] State of New York, Education Law, Section 2215. (1955), p. 288.

> A district superintendent shall be subject to such regulations and directions as the commissioner of education shall from time to time prescribe.[15]

Under these broad regulations the District Superintendent is legally obligated to support curriculum changes, tax increases when deemed needed, and reorganization as a movement to better education in the State. Can he further these aims "on his own"?

> The officer who is responsible for district reorganization under the law may stipulate the conditions under which he will act. For example: The district superintendent may indicate that he will not issue an order of consolidation unless he has evidence by petition that two-thirds of the voters of each district favor the action or he may stipulate that he will act on a majority petition or by support shown at informally called meetings. He may make no stipulations and proceed on the basis of the needs of the situation as he sees them. Since it is apparent that the Legislature has indicated preference for the Master Plan organization, district superintendents have been directed by the Commissioner of Education to confer with him prior to making consolidations by order. The purpose of such a conference is to prevent actions that will jeopardize the Master Plan organization.[16]

The "laying-out" petitions and the subsequent Commissioner's order (See Appendixes B and C) serve two main purposes; they ascertain that certain polling and campaigning has been done among the voters and that a large number of voters are in favor of considering reorganization.

The Citizens' Committees of both communities organized for a long and hard campaign. Many of the committee members had served on the two-year study evaluating both schools' space requirements and curricula. The two co-chairmen had played

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[15] Op. cit., Section 2216, p. 289.

[16] State Education Department, "School District Organization and Procedures in District Reorganization." (May 24, 1952), p. 4.

key roles on sub-committees of the Educational Survey and Planning Committee. In short, the Citizens' Committees were well-informed on school matters. They also enjoyed the full co-operation of all school officials.

What obstacles could they expect? What help could they expect from the State Education Department? The Department advised:

> It usually becomes necessary for a large body of people to become concerned and acquainted with the reorganization proposal. The most effective approach in securing this participation has been for local lay committees to project programs in a spirit of fact-finding. This indicates that the reorganization is initiated locally and not by the state. When interest develops and a proposition comes to the Commissioner, it is his responsibility to give general and prior approval. The lay committee which has come into being because of the local needs may secure help through local professional staff and the Education Department in planning educational programs and estimating building and transportation needs and costs.... If it appears to the committees that the re-organization proposals have merit, they must fall back on their own resources in advising the voters of the district with regard to details. Common practice is to prepare and distribute brochures which explain the principal features of the district reorganization plan. When committees consider that the proposition is understood in its full details and the people are ready to render a decision, they may endeavor to secure petitions to ascertain the true extent of local support. The Commissioner makes his own appraisal and if he concludes that the matter should come to vote, he will thereupon act.[17]

The campaign for petition signatures faced many difficulties. At first, the signature-gathering went very well; then a foot-dragging process set in — voters began to feel The Citizens Committee was

> high-pressuring people and they think many people are too ignorant to think for themselves and not intelligent enough to understand the facts in the brochure and those that came from the meetings.... To the board (sic) and Citizens Committee: Treat people as though they have some degree of intelligence and some ability to think for themselves. Respect opinions even though they differ

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[17] Ibid., p. 5.

from yours.[18]

On May 2, 1963 another letter had appeared in The Oneonta Star written by Mr. Stuart Hurlburt. Mr. Hurlburt warned that people were signing the petitions to "lay out the district" and then would vote down the reorganization in the election. On the same date an editorial appeared in The Oneonta Star praising the two communities for acting "with courage and vision while campaigning carefully and honestly with conscientious leadership." It should be mentioned that the area newspapers were decidedly in favor of the plan and reported nearly every activity of the Citizens Committee. Indeed, the This n That, a small rural weekly, carried a series of articles as their main news item during the "laying-out" petition campaign.

The paper said:

> After a great deal of study the State Education Department concludes that there is a greater efficiency of teachers and use of facilities as well as improved curriculum in the larger schools. The Diefendorf plan recommended larger grants of State Aid for consolidation of smaller districts into larger units. As this pertains to Otego and Unadilla the state will pay 77.5% of the building cost of a new Junior-Senior high school....
>
> In addition to the financial advantages of consolidation, the Citizens Committee members feel that better educational facilities would be available to the students....
>
> The various committees are in the final phase of assembling additional information which will be released shortly. A series of speakers will be available for various organizations to speak about the reorganization proposal.[19]

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[18]Letter to the Editor, The Oneonta Star, from Mrs. Charles Sheldon, Otego, N.Y., May 4, 1963.

[19]This n That, December 26, 1962.

These articles were mimeographed and re-distributed during the height of the campaign in May, 1963. Following the appearance of the two letters in the Star, Superintendent Tyson wrote to Mr. Benedict asking if he could appear and advise the Board, the administrators, and other influential citizens on the campaign. He enclosed Mr. Hurlburt's letter and the Star editorial.

Mr. Benedict[20] wrote that Mr. Hurlburt was correct in advising people not to sign if opposed; he praised the Star editorial and ended by saying that he was quite willing to meet with the Boards of Education and the administrators. When he met with the group he advised that the campaign continue.

During an interview with this writer Mr. Benedict[21] said that he did not see any organized opposition that was found to be common in the last 81 centralizations. Some of these elements and the number of times mentioned as the main reason for opposing centralization were:

1. Concern with increased costs (76)
2. Prospective loss of local control (44)
3. Transportation issue (conveyance of young pupils over long distances) (32)
4. Preference for an alternative plan (32)
5. Resistance to change (inertia) (27)
6. Conflicts among prospective districts (25)
7. Internal controversy (25)

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[20]Letter from Mr. Donald Benedict, Acting Chief, Bureau of Rural Administrative Services, to Mr. Harold Tyson, District Superintendent, Unadilla, N.Y., May 3, 1963.

[21]Interview with Mr. Donald Benedict, Acting Chief, Bureau of Rural Administrative Services, April 23, 1964.

With scattered responses the following was also mentioned in opposing further centralization; lack of understanding the reorganization movement and intense crystallization of opposition groups.[22] Mr. Benedict did not see any of these developing in the Otego—Unadilla situation — either in the "laying-out" campaign or in the election. As it turned out, Mr. Benedict was quite correct in his assessment. In early May Mr. Tyson reported that 62% of the estimated number of Otego voters signed petitions and 63.4% of the Unadilla voters signed favoring a "laying-out" order and a subsequent election on district reorganization.

Following the favorable "laying-out" vote plans were quickly made for the reorganization election. It was decided that the Citizens Committees re-visit voters, have more panels, and otherwise encourage open discussions. There was a latent fear that eligible voters, not contacted by the petition-carriers, would come "out of the hills" and vote down the reorganization. It was now nearly June; Mr. Tyson wrote to the Bureau asking if there was any merit in postponing the actual vote until after July 1, 1963, thus averting the necessary administrative and fiscal changes which would follow a late June election. He was advised to proceed as rapidly as possible by Dr. Charles Brind, Legal Counsel. In fact, as according to Law Pamphlet 14 School District Reorganization, Mr. Tyson was advised to utilize the two school clerks in setting up the following election conditions.

1. Posting conspiciously the yellow election notices at least ten days prior to the election.

2. Publishing the election notice at least three days before the meeting.

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[22]William C. Sayres, Recurring Reasons for Resistance to Centralization. State Education Department (Albany, N.Y. Division of Research, April 1960), pp. 3-4.

3. Nominating a Board of Canvass, pending the Commissioner's approval, to supervise the election. It was to be a 7 member Board; 4 from Unadilla and 3 from Otego.

4. Setting up of one central voting place.

5. Posting of voting time. Since this was a special election, the polling time could be nearly any choice of hours. It was 12 to 8 in this election.

6. Maintaining of poll books and delivering of ballot boxes to Board of Canvass.

It should be mentioned that the long experience of the school clerks is counted on largely to expedite these functions. Also, since the petitions are on file with the town clerk, and all Board Meeting minutes have to be notarized there seems to be a natural relationship and concern between the school and town clerks. Also, if no schoolhouse is in a district the Commissioner can request a polling place — usually it will be the central voting place used in political elections. To illustrate the functional aspects of the different clerks' roles, the following is quoted regarding the annexation of school districts at special meetings.

> A copy of the minutes of the meeting or meetings, duly certified by the clerk, must be filed by him with the Commissioner of Education, with each superintendent of schools having jurisdiction, and with the town clerk of each town in which any part of the district or districts in question is located.[23]

The purpose of emphasizing the clerks' roles is to point out the highly integrative role that they played in this movement. Mrs. Louise Bump, Otego Central School's clerk for 17 years, served as secretary to the Otego Citizens Committee, which Mrs. Margaret Marcellus, secretary to Mr. Tyson, served on the

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[23]State Education Department, Law Pamphlet 14: School District Reorganization. (Albany, N. Y.: 1962), p. 56.

Unadilla Citizens Committee. These people were extremely valuable in adhering to the procedural education laws relating to reorganization. For instance, Mrs. Louise W. Bump[24] reported that in order for voting to take place in both Otego and Unadilla a special request had to be filed under article 37 of the Education Law, (b) alternative procedure which said

> The purpose of this section was to provide a more convenient method of holding this school meeting so that the voters of those component school districts of a proposed new centralization who so desire can vote at polling places closer to their homes.[25]

She also reported that Board members of the two districts had to be notified and a schedule of supervision had to be worked out. The Commissioner's order stipulated that a Board of Canvass would count the votes at a "central counting place" and Board members would be present at the election.

On June 18, 1963 the special election was held and the reorganization vote was successful by 766 to 670. Of the number voting, 53.4% favored the reorganization. Sadly, this figure represented only 52.1% of the total number of eligible voters in the combined districts.

On June 21, 1963 Superintendent Tyson received a congratulatory letter which ended with "I hope we can get Franklin in pretty soon. Hope you will work on Amenzo (District Superintendent over Franklin Central School which is in Delaware County) when you can."[26]

Yes, the inexorable force of reorganization rolled a little further that day. But, what problems did it leave behind for the newly—organized district to face? What issues face a reorganized district immediately? Does the State continue to support plans and programs in the district?

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[24]Interview with Mrs. Louise W. Bump, District Clerk, Otego—Unadilla Central School District, April 27, 1964.

[25]Law Pamphlet 14, loc. cit., p. 50.

[26]Letter from Frances E. Griffin, Chief, Bureau of Rural Administrative Services to Mr. Harold Tyson, District Superintendent, June 21, 1963.

PART IV

THE REORGANIZED SCHOOL DISTRICT FACES THE FUTURE

Mr. Tyson was quite correct in anticipating administrative and financial difficulties with an election held on June 18th with the fiscal year beginning on July 1. The law states

> Where the voters at the meeting have adopted the resolution to organize the central school district and to establish a central school or schools therein, the new central school district begins its operation as a new district on July 1 next following the date of the meeting. The State aid payable to such a new district will be the sum of those amounts to which the component districts became entitled, based on their operations during the school year during which the meeting to organize the central district took place.[27]

It would appear that the State had made proper provision for this merely by allowing all current State aid according to the present aid-ratio. Mr. Tyson[28] pointed out that this is not the case as expenses begin immediately in the form of stationery changes, transportation changes, and increased curricular offerings. To immediately raise taxes or borrow would jeopardize subsequent expenses such as bond issues and building programs. As an exigency measure the State

> authorizes the new board of education, prior to such July 1, however, to issue tax anticipation notes not in excess of 2 percent of the assessed valuation of the new central school district. The moneys realized therefrom can be used for engaging architects, engineers, attorneys, etc., for the purpose of planning the new central school district's proposed building program.[29]

The State has provided for nearly every type of contingency that can occur — from increased in the aid-ratio to overlap of one month in the terms of the outgoing and newly elected Board members. The State may have over-looked one item —

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[27]Law Pamphlet 14, loc. cit., p. 49.

[28]Interview with Mr. Harold Tyson, District Superintendent, April 24, 1964.

[29]Law Pamphlet 14, loc. cit., p. 49.

the constant quest for local economy and the attempts by local school administrators to stay within their budgets not relying upon sudden increases or turning to anticipatory notes.

Following a reorganization election the Commissioner issues an order calling for an election of a new Board of Education for the reorganized district. This order was issued and an organization meeting and Board election was scheduled on July 9, 1963 at the Otego Central School.

Mr. Percy Tompkins, Co-chairman of the Citizens Committee, now temporary chairman of this meeting, called the meeting to order. Mrs. Louise W. Bump was nominated as clerk of the meeting.

The issues developed quickly

> Mr. Walter Owen, as a member of the Citizens' Committee, asked permission of the chairman to speak to the people and permission was granted. Mr. Owen mentioned the gentlemen's agreement that the new Board of Education to be elected, if a seven member Board, would have three members from Unadilla, three members from Otego and one member from Wellsbridge or surrounding area.[30]

This motion was opposed. A motion was proposed to elect a nine member Board (the highest legal number that the State allows); this motion passed by a vote of 220 to 138. Of the nine terms there were two positions in each bracket ranging from the 5 year terms down to the 2 year terms, and ending with a single one year term. Nominations began singly for each of the nine terms.

Then

> Vincent Bush of the Citizens' Committee asked for permission to speak, permission was granted and Mr. Bush proposed a slate of candidates for members. He gave a brief resume of the background of the candidates proposed so that the voters might be better informed of their qualifications.[31]

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[30]Minutes of the First Reorganization and Board Election Meeting of the Otego-Unadilla Central School District, Otego, N.Y., July 9, 1963, p. 1.

[31]Ibid., p. 3.

A Citizens' Committee slate had been proposed! Discussion and debate lasted until 1:45 a.m. the next day. When it was finally decided 7 out of the 9 candidates proposed by Mr. Bush were elected. In a subsequent run-off election Mrs. Margaret Owen, on the Citizens' Committee slate, was elected for a one year term.

The opposing minority had debated long and hard. But they had no large numbers of votes and their arguments were mostly against recognized Committee workers. Another interesting aspect was that other community leaders that were proposed declined, "stating that they preferred to support the slate proposed."[32]

The new Board was installed and the minutes of the meeting were notarized on July 15, 1963 by Carmilla Ritchey, Notary Public, Otsego County. The new Board was ready for business and it was not long in coming.

The main issue facing the new Board was the building of the new Junior-Senior High School. At this point the Board became engaged in site selection. There were two sites to be considered. They were:

1. The Earl site, a mile or so south of Otego on Route 7, with an asking price of $40,000.

2. The Sternberg site, 3 miles north of Unadilla on Route 7, with an asking price of $75,000.

In an interview with this writer Mr. Tyson[33] reported that the Earl site would need landscaping which would probably equate the prices somewhat. He also said that soil borings, gravel analysis, and surveying of water table levels would cost the District approximately $6,000 and that there was little money in the current budget for this item.

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[32] Ibid., (This was especially true in the case of Mr. John Snopkowski, a former Co-chairman both of the Evaluation and Survey Committee of Unadilla and the Citizens' Committee).

[33] Interview with Mr. Harold Tyson ... April 24, 1964.

While the writer was sitting in Mr. Tyson's office a phone call came from Dr. Charles Brind, Legal Counsel, State Education Department, giving a legal ruling on the election of the building site in the district. The Education Department advocated putting up one site for a vote and then the other, if needed. The local school officials favored a Site A versus Site B election. Dr. Brind's decision was the following

> If two sites are put up for election, the voters must have the following choices;
>
> a) They can vote <u>for</u> both sites.
> b) They can vote <u>against</u> both sites.
> c) They can vote for Site A and against Site B.
> d) They can reverse (c).
> e) They can vote for either Site; ignoring the other.

While this Education Department ruling caused some consternation for the school district administrators it did have a built-in advantage (or control, if you will) because it literally forced the electorate to give the officials a clear-cut mandate-either accept or reject a site.

Subsequent borings and investigations revealed that the Earl site did not possess an adequate water supply and it was never voted on.[34]

The Department ruling was in effect on December 15, 1964 when the Sternberg Property on Ballot A was defeated (700 No versus 446 Yes votes) along with the Knight-Northrup (a 57 acre site, priced at $48,500) which was defeated (619 No versus 407 Yes votes) also. In a functional control sense this vote emphasized the Department's position that one site not be arrayed against another but that the populace show a clear preference for one site on its merits. Thus, smoothing the way for subsequent bond issues on such items junior and senior high buildings,

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[34] Letter from Mr. Harold Tyson, District Superintendent, to Mr. David W. Brenner, Director of Registration, State University College, Oneonta, N.Y., December 20, 1966.

swimming pools, bus garages, etc.

On the third site vote, conducted on November 10, 1965, the newly-surveyed compromise Schreiber-Burnside site located approximately 1/4 mile west of the Sternberg site on Route 7 was approved by a margin of 965 Yes to 256 No votes.[35]

While it is somewhat unclear why the final approving vote was conducted on single site basis it is fair to assume that the school officials probably felt that sentiment was too high against the other sites for further consideration. In any event, the Schreiber-Burnside's 79.8% approval margin was very impressive and it seemed to portend future community approval because on August 11, 1966 a $3.5 million bond issue was passed for the building of a new junior-senior high school — 652 Yes to 282 No votes. At the same time, a separate $250,000 swimming pool was soundly defeated — 617 No to 300 Yes votes. It would be fair to assume that the school officials, sensing an "economy" twinge in the two communities, was unwilling to make the pool an integral part of the building bond issue.

Their judgment was clearly vindicated.

At the present time the District's State aid-ratio is 78.5%. While this appears high it is comparable to other districts in the area. There was a piece of legislation before the Governor which would have the financial picture changed favorably for the Otego-Unadilla building program; it was the "Waters' Bill" popularly called the "Incentive and Impedance Bill" (See Chart No. 1 and Appendix A). Its purpose had a clear-cut meaning — get Franklin to reorganize with you this year and State aid for the new school will reach over 90%.[36] Governor Rockefeller vetoed this Bill on April 27, 1964.

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Interview with Mr. Donald Benedict ... April 28, 1964.

Personnel-wise there are going to be many problems facing the new district. Salary committees have been formed and negotiations are being carried on. Some teachers, expecting raises, are complaining that, "they have combined all the bad features of both salary schedules into the new one."

In regard to administrative appointments and tenure, all positions except probationary are covered. Both top school administrators are staying on the job and have adjusted well to the increased burden of the reorganization process.

The Oneonta Star, ever faithful, pointed out in an editorial

> A mark of a responsible and alert community is the ease with which it submits to progress.
>
> The need for the original district to expand facilities was obvious but the consolidation and the joint junior and senior high were not necessarily natural consequences. However, the idea was visioned by the right people and they worked not so much to "sell" it as to inform the many others involved.
>
> The result has been solid achievement .... Few predictions are certain but the people of Unadilla and Otego already have the admiration of the rest of us and no one would suggest this won't continue far after completion of the current school project.[37]

The reorganized district seems well on the way to fulfilling its objectives of providing a better quality of education for the youth of the district — "truly thinking and acting anew."

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[37]The Oneonta Star, May 2, 1964, p. 4.

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